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Statement made on behalf of the Secretary-General by the Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development before the Second Committee on 9 November 1993

I have the honour to make a statement, on behalf of the Secretary-General, in introduction of the discussion in this Committee on agenda item 154, "United Nations interim offices". In this connection, I wish also to refer to the report of the Secretary-General entitled "United Nations interim offices", which is contained in document A/48/146/Add.1. As stated therein, that report has been submitted in fulfilment of the Secretary-General's undertaking in document A/C.5/47/89 of 23 March 1993 to report to the General Assembly on the experience gained in the establishment and functioning of seven United Nations interim offices and was intended to be the "broad, policy-oriented report to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session" referred to in paragraph 4 of the seventeenth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/47/7/Add.16 of 30 March 1993). I should add that since the issuance of that report the Secretary-General has benefited from a wide variety of views conveyed to him formally and informally on the matter. This statement, which takes into account the views expressed to the Secretary-General, should be viewed as representing the up-to-date position of the Secretary-General on the question.

In its resolution 47/199, entitled "Triennial policy review of operational activities for development within the United Nations system", the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to ensure that the operational activities for development within the United Nations system carried out in new recipient countries are undertaken, from the outset" - I repeat "from the outset" - "on the basis of an integrated, unified, cost-effective and innovative approach to development cooperation and presence in the countries concerned and to ensure effective support to them, while ensuring that such support is not to the detriment of existing programmes for developing countries". The United Nations interim offices have been established within this context and on the basis of those guidelines.

At the same time, other related provisions of resolution 47/199 call forcefully for action to be taken to ensure a more effective, unified presence at the country level. The resolution specifically emphasizes "the importance [the General Assembly] attaches to a more effective and coherent coordinated approach by the United Nations system to the needs of recipient countries, particularly at the field level". It mandates the Secretary-General "to strengthen the resident coordinator system" and contains a number of provisions designed for that purpose. In particular, it calls for "improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations system at the field level, through a fully coordinated multidisciplinary approach to the needs of recipient countries under the leadership of the resident coordinator"; encourages "individual specialized agencies at the field level to participate fully in all aspects of the resident coordinator system"; proposes "enhancing the responsibility and authority of the resident coordinator for the planning and coordination of programmes"; and mandates the preparation of country strategy notes "in all recipient countries where the Government so chooses" under the leadership of the resident coordinator. A major thrust of resolution 47/199 is thus to promote greater coherence, coordination and efficiency in the activities of the United Nations development system in the field, building on past experience and existing legislative mandates. This effort must be pursued in the interests of recipient countries and in full cooperation with them. Its basic purpose must be to make the provision of United Nations assistance demand-driven on the basis of the expressed preferences of the recipient countries.

In seeking to respond to these mandates, the Secretary-General has proceeded to conduct two separate but related exercises. One exercise has been the establishment of the interim offices in accordance with the guidelines provided. The second exercise has been the implementation of the provisions of resolution 47/199 in respect of the resident coordinator and other linked provisions; progress to date in this regard has been reported on to the Economic and Social at its substantive session this year (E/1993/73). I will have more to say on this when the item on operational activities for development is taken up in this Committee. Both these processes are rooted in the same ground - resolution 47/199 with its interlinked provisions. The Secretary-General has sought to ensure, therefore, that, though separate, these processes are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Let me turn to the first of these exercises. In responding to the request of the General Assembly for an innovative approach which would also ensure an integrated presence, the Secretary-General decided to establish offices in new recipient countries in which the representatives of all United Nations programmes and funds operating in those countries would form a part. The perception that the United Nations is fragmented has, as one of its most visible manifestations, the plethora of offices in the field. Integration of effort, reflected through a single visible presence, marks an important new advance in the drive for a unified, cost-effective United Nations presence in the field.

The Secretary-General's approach in both exercises has been adopted with two aims in mind. Substantively, it is intended to respond to the demands of Member States for a better coordinated and multidisciplinary response to the needs of recipient countries in the implementation of programmes, while maintaining the separate identities of funds and programmes. Administratively,

it is intended to respond to the urgings of the General Assembly to reduce administrative costs and maximize resources available for programme delivery through, inter alia, the establishment of common premises for United Nations offices in recipient countries. In the case of the interim offices, substantive coordination and administrative simplification have been ensured from the outset. The Secretary-General has expressed the hope that the specialized agencies would choose to be associated with these offices and the Administrative Committee on Coordination has welcomed his decision to work for a more unified field presence.

The Secretary-General felt that from the outset the heads of the new offices should have the means to exercise the desired leadership in the field. It was, therefore, decided to use the title "United Nations representative" for the heads of the offices in order to enhance their capacity to perform as team leaders in the field and to assist the host Government by establishing clear focal point arrangements on the United Nations side from the start. At the same time, the Secretary-General proceeded from the assumption that in almost all cases the same person would serve as both United Nations representative and resident coordinator and that the person would normally be the resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It should be borne in mind that the Secretary-General has also been requested in resolution 47/199 to "widen the pool of qualified development professionals eligible for appointment as United Nations Development Programme resident representatives/resident coordinators to include the members of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy" and to ensure that "the creation of an additional bureaucratic layer should be avoided". In making the appointments of United Nations representatives, the Secretary-General has not overlooked these guidelines.

Concern has been expressed that in addition to responsibilities and functions in the area of development activities, the United Nations interim offices would be expected to perform political functions without legislative mandate. Concern has also been expressed that the offices might assume functions to the detriment of the primary, development-support objectives of United Nations offices in the field. Furthermore, there appears to be concern that a "politicized" new model for United Nations offices in the field is being advanced, which will then be extended to the existing network of United Nations field offices. On behalf of the Secretary-General, allow me to state emphatically that none of these concerns is grounded in reality.

United Nations public information activities are an integral component of the interim offices. The coordination of humanitarian assistance of the United Nations system at the country level in complex emergencies requiring a coordinated response is normally the responsibility of the resident coordinator, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 - a responsibility which is assumed by the heads of field offices not only in new recipient countries but in other countries as well. Some of these activities involve aspects that may not fall within the accepted definition of operational activities for development. All, however, take place as a result of clear legislative mandates and in agreement with the countries concerned.

Another concern that has been expressed relates to the possible use of the interim offices for human rights monitoring and that such activities would be

extended to other United Nations field offices. No general legislative mandate of this nature has been conferred on the Secretary-General. When the Secretary-General is required to undertake human rights, preventive diplomacy or peace-keeping activities in particular countries in response to General Assembly or Security Council mandates, he will consult with the Government concerned to determine, with its consent, how such mandates can be implemented. There is no intention to have such activities form part of the functions of the interim offices, except where specific mandates exist. In this connection, it is worth noting that the United Nations is being asked increasingly by Governments to provide technical assistance for the democratization process within States in areas such as electoral support and the development of constitutional law.

The Secretary-General is convinced that the brief, experimental experience to date with the interim offices has been positive. He believes that the functions being carried out by these offices are in accordance with legislative mandates, especially those calling for an integrated, unified, cost-effective and innovative approach to development cooperation and presence in new recipient countries, the strengthening of the resident coordinator system and the development of a more integrated, multidisciplinary United Nations presence in the field. The interim offices have been established in full cooperation and with the agreement of the countries concerned, which he feels have benefited already from their presence. The main function of these offices has been, and will continue to be, to respond to the development needs of the countries concerned, including through the provision of coordinated humanitarian assistance where required. The United Nations is under increasing pressure from Member States to rationalize its activities, minimize administrative expenses and conduct its work in a coherent and coordinated fashion. The United Nations interim offices are a response to these concerns in the specific context of the needs and preferences of new recipient countries and in conformity with existing legislative mandates.